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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 007336

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: CABINET SHAKE-UP EXPECTED

REF: A. AMMAN 6213

[1](#)B. AMMAN 6545

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: PM Fayez has told the press a cabinet shuffle will occur soon, probably by early October. For different reasons, he and ministers heavily involved in Jordan's economic and social reform successes appear safe for now, but a degree of royal disfavor with Fayez remains evident. End Summary.

WILL FAYEZ STAY OR WILL HE GO?

[1](#)2. (C) With no immediate crisis to focus their minds, Amman's political observers are engaged in widespread speculation about the future of the Fayez Cabinet. The Prime Minister fueled the rumor mill when he told an influential local daily on August 28 that he expected a shuffle to take place after October 1 -- when he is due to respond to the King's demand for a status report on the government's progress in its first year (ref a). This has naturally further disgruntled his entire cabinet, whose members have been made instant lame ducks just as the King is trying to energize them into post-summer activism.

[1](#)3. (C) With Jordan's political system still highly dependent on the motivations and actions of one man, the guessing game on the cabinet and PM's future is fueled primarily by supposed insights into the thinking of King Abdullah. The King's mid-July letter expressing dissatisfaction with the performance of Fayez, whose principal strength is his perceived closeness to the King, provided unusual open evidence of rifts within ruling circles. Privately, GID Chief/National Security Advisor Sa'ad Kheir and Court Minister al-Rifai say frankly that Fayez has all too sadly met their low expectations. (Ironically, it is Kheir's security apparatus that receives a significant share of the blame from reform activists for the government's failure thus far to move forward on its political development agenda.) With the scent of blood in the air, aspiring prime ministers in the cabinet -- Deputy PM Halaiqa and Planning Minister Awadallah -- make no secret of their own ambitions.

GOVERNMENT'S INEPTITUDE WEAKENS KING

[1](#)4. (C) The starting point of reports of change is the patchy performance of the Fayez government. Criticism of Fayez focuses on managerial ineptness, a certain obtuseness on policy details, and political abilities that do not stretch beyond a quest for personal popularity through regional travel and humanitarian handouts from the PM's slush fund. His efforts to woo parliament have yielded minimal results, and the King appears to have cut short the summer's extraordinary parliamentary session out of frustration that it was not smartly adopting into permanent legislation over 200 temporary laws that form the foundation of his socio-economic vision for Jordan. To keep the ball rolling on his broad reform agenda, it is the King (not the PM) who is seen on a daily basis briefing interested parties, cajoling his senior team, and demanding performance from the civil service. Awadallah expressed to Charge his concern that this approach ties the King too closely to the ups and downs of progress, by removing the traditional shield the cabinet and PM have provided to the palace, and insulation of the King from criticism on day-to-day performance. Meanwhile, with a parliament that proved disappointing to almost every faction in Jordan, the political field has once again been left open to the professional associations, stacked with hardy survivors of the 1960s and 1970s when they and the Muslim Brotherhood alone were permitted political room. They traffic in mindless rhetoric of anti-normalization, anti-semitism, and knee-jerk anti-U.S. policy, in which all of Jordan's ills are laid on foreigners' doorsteps. Victims of the recent flare-up in this campaign included a leading parliamentary reform spirit, Raed Qaqish, who received little support from a government supposedly committed to quieting anti-normalization forces.

[1](#)5. (C) With Fayez, weaknesses seen as the real source of the cabinet's problems, his removal would be the logical

solution. However, Fayeze came into office so clearly identified as the King's man, that his sacking would be a painful admission of failure by Abdullah. More fundamentally, the King has limited options for a successor. Royal Court Minister al-Rifai is having a strong run of success advising the King, who seems to have unqualified admiration for this able, smooth, and often wise scion of a family which has produced two prime ministers already. Samir's day as PM seems inevitable, but he still is unseasoned, with no record in management or public speaking. If selected now, he could suffer the same fate as Fayeze, whom he replaced at the palace. Other candidates carry unwanted baggage. The choice of a Palestinian, such as Deputy PM Halaqi or Planning Minister Awadallah, could generate domestic headaches the King probably wants to avoid, although Halaqi has a commendable combination of political, managerial, and economic talents. Awadallah, in his star reform performance, has alienated parliament and other sectors by breaking from traditional patronage practices on which these groups thrive. So, most senior government, palace and security contacts predict to Charge and Embassy officers that Fayeze will stay, despite his flaws.

WITH CABINET REORGANIZATION CERTAIN, HOW FAR WILL IT GO?

16. (C) Regardless of whether Fayeze stays or goes, it is a foregone conclusion that there will be a reshuffle of some kind. With parliament due to return in early November, it is time for the palace and government to retrench. Two ministerial offshoots are planned, a favored device of this King to strategize, issue commands, and mobilize his reformist allies. According to such insiders as Awadallah, several ministries are likely to be restructured. For example, some doubled-up ministries such as Tourism and Environment will be split again to relieve overburdened ministers. Complete dud such as Political Reform and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Daoudiyah will go, as well as Health's Darwazeh. IT minister Zu'bi, a strong reformist ally of the King, seems determined to leave for personal reasons, perhaps to be replaced by the miscast and accident-prone spokesperson, Asma Khader, or Jordan's ambassador to Washington, Karim Kwar. Others rumored to be on the chopping block are Labor Minister Amjad Majali and Municipal Affairs Minister Amal Farhan. Rumors persist that Muasher recently fell out of favor over his attempts to "clarify" the King's recent critical comments about the PA leadership (ref b), but no one in authority has endorsed that speculation with us.

OTHER CHANGES UNDERWAY: PRINCE FAISAL IN NEW POSITION

17. (C) Against this backdrop, other significant changes in King Abdullah's ruling circle are quietly underway. Prince Faisal is to be shifted from command of the Air Force into a still-evolving position, coordinator for Air Force projects or perhaps a second vice-chairman of the Armed Forces. The precise source of the King's discontent with Faisal is unclear, but a recent spate of jet accidents under Faisal's watch may have played into the King's decision. Faisal's likely replacement is Air Force director of operations, Abd al-Halleem Mahfzah. However, it may only be temporary, as many observers believe he is not one to "knock heads" and bring into line many strong personalities moving in many directions. Mahfzah is otherwise able and has spoken to Charge of his absolute commitment to strong relations with Israeli counterparts. JAF Vice Chair Nsairat has already been cashiered, promoted and retired, and said to have vague promises of a position outside the military. The motivations for his removal appear to be complex, by-products of his rivalry with the chairman and perhaps of the need to make room for Faisal at GHQ, seen as not big enough for two Air Force chieftains.

THE KING'S DILEMMA

18. (C) The impending changes have preoccupied Ammanites, who seem more concerned with the personalities involved than with the substance of the issues at hand, including Fayeze's anticipated status report on his government's accomplishment in the first year. It highlights once again the dilemma facing a reform-minded King who is, in many ways, ahead of his people on these issues. Pulled forward by his own vision (and those of a few select advisors around him), he is restrained by elements of society that either feel threatened by reform, don't understand it, or simply prefer traditions that have served them and their families well (with Fayeze fitting the last category). As one journalist recently noted: "The King is more liberal than the prime minister, who is more liberal than the parliament, which is more liberal than the people." The King remains partly constrained by the

dilemma that it is the leadership of his own loyalist base -- personified by Fayez and much of parliament, and representing the tribal and rural conservatives of the East Bank -- which is failing to meet his high standards. Therefore, he may be treading warily as he amends his cabinet, strengthening its reformist wings but retaining Fayez for his symbolic value, if for little else.

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